



Keys Residents and Team Ocean Volunteers Aid Sea Turtle

One Saturday in June, Keys residents Jamie and Joan Wheeler were out boating when they found a sick sea turtle struggling on the surface unable to dive. Concerned for the turtle, the Wheelers hailed the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary on VHF Channel 16. Team OCEAN volunteers Frank and Carolyn Fasano responded to the Wheelers request for assistance in transporting the loggerhead to shore.

The Fasanos reported the turtle to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Officers (formerly the Marine Patrol) and received permission to bring her aboard the vessel. They were further instructed to bring the distressed turtle to the Key West Aquarium where the ambulance from the Turtle Hospital transported her to the hospital in Marathon. The Wheelers and Fasanos are to be commended for responding appropriately in this rescue situation.



Photo: Bill Goodwin

Unfortunately, in spite of the efforts made by the Wheelers, the Fasanos, and the Turtle Hospital staff, the loggerhead died. Turtle Hospital staff performed a necropsy and determined the cause of death to be a rubber grommet wrapped in a piece of plastic lodged in its digestive system.

At the Turtle Hospital in Marathon, Director Richie Moretti (left) and world-renowned explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau (right) examine a rehabilitated sea turtle prior to releasing her back into the wild.

During the necropsy, the following items were also found in her gut: two plastic ball point pens, a pink plastic clothes-pin, a piece of square rubber sponge, pieces of torn netting, a small plastic bottle, numerous pieces of plastic shards, blue plastic strapping, numerous pieces of plastic bags and numerous pieces of polypropylene rope (string).

Fortunately, not all rescues end this way. Recently, Jean-Michel Cousteau and Turtle Hospital Director Richie Moretti released a rehabilitated turtle back into the wild. If you find an injured sea turtle, marine mammal, or bird while boating, please contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by dialing *FMP on a cell phone or 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922). For more information about the turtle hospital, please visit <http://www.turtlehospital.org/>.

*Note: This article appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, **Sounding Line**. For more information, visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov.*

Spotted Eagle Ray Freed from Lobster Trap Line



Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary program assistant Robert Keeley freed a spotted eagle ray from a lobster trap line. The line was tightly wound around the animal's snout, restricting its ability to breathe and feed. Robert, who works with the Sanctuary's Team OCEAN (Ocean Conservation Education Action Network) program, came across the ray while providing information to boaters at the reef off Key West. For information on becoming a Team OCEAN volunteer, call the Lower Keys Team OCEAN Coordinator John Nazzaro at (305) 292-0311.

*Note: This article appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, **Sounding Line**.*